

FULL TEXT SPEECH – GOV. TOGIOLA TULAFONO
AMERICAN SAMOA POPULATION SUMMIT
Summit Theme: “*Managing Change*”
September 24 and 25, 2008
Venue: Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium – Fale Laumei
Utulei

Governor’s Speech: “The Challenges of Managing Population Change”

President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Members of the Fono, Directors, off island colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Talofa and Good Morning!

Let me start by welcoming each and every one of you to this momentous Population Summit. Thank you for your interest and participation. It is wonderful to see such a gathering of people who have come together to discuss such an important issue for our Territory, and especially for ourselves and our children. Today, we come together to discuss the challenges that our growing population is placing on our Territory’s natural, economic and social resources. Although complex in many ways, it is also as simple as, “too many people, on too little land”.

The Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG) has determined that the pressures of our growing population are the single greatest threat to our coastal resources. I strongly agree with this assessment. Population pressure is a tremendous challenge facing our small islands and if this issue is left unchecked and not properly managed, there is not a man, woman or child in American Samoa that will escape the impact of population growth.

The recent Pacific Arts Festival provides us with a perfect example of what the future may hold. During that two week period, our island was home to approximately 3,000 guests and the impacts of more island residents were noticeable: traffic was more congested in town, lines were longer at restaurants and the bank, and we faced an enormous challenge in managing trash removal. Let us not neglect this valuable glimpse into the future from the Festival during our discussions of the next two days. Although our guests have now left the island and their impact was short-lived, this will not be the case with our current population issues, which are challenging and long-lasting.

Population growth in American Samoa will affect our quality and way of life. Our resources, in some areas, already stretched too thin, will continue to diminish. In addition, 40% of our population is under the age of 15, this means with even the strictest of population reduction controls in place, our population will continue to grow.

The problems associated with this growth are inevitable and must be appropriately managed. If not, the alternative is:

More strains on social and economic resources;

More cars choking our already busy roads;

More children than our limited schools can adequately accommodate;

More trash than waste removal resources can handle;

More patients seeking services at our hospital and health clinics;

More housing issues to burden our infrastructure capabilities; and

More hungry mouths to feed.

These changing circumstances cannot be managed by simply building more schools, more houses, and more roads. Our island paradise is small, and we cannot continue with this short-sighted way of thinking as we have in the past.

The Government has recognized the problem and has been addressing this issue since May 2000, when I was the Chair of a Task Force on Population Growth. Since that time, the problem, much like our population, has continued to grow. While certain solutions have been proposed, a new sense of urgency exists. The time for action is now.

Gathered together in this room today are the individuals working on issues related to population pressure in American Samoa, as well as several honored guests with relevant experience in population issues. Thank you for participating in this Summit. However, simply attending this Summit is not enough to bring about change - commitment, dialogue, and collaboration are essential. I challenge each of you to spend the next two days discussing these important issues and creating collaborative solutions to these serious problems. The outcomes you achieve will serve as the basis for the Government of American Samoa to effectively develop and implement policies and enforcement procedures that will eventually be drafted into law by our legislators. As a result, the body of work you produce over the next two days will have a profound effect on the future of our Territory, our children, and our way and quality of life.

The underlying ethic as we move forward is the monumental challenge of accommodating our needs today without compromising the needs of future generations... This concept is strongly rooted in our cultural heritage...Fa'atoetoe Le Muli o le Ola" (to keep for them the remainder of the basket). Inherent within this proverb is the fact that our resources are not finite, there are limits, and in an island

setting as ours, the primary threat comes from “PEOPLE” and how they behave responsibly in their use of land, water and air.

Our people have lived in this beautiful and unique island setting for centuries, but times are changing. How do we adapt to these changes without compromising our natural resources, our identity as American Samoans, or our traditional way of life? How do we sustain our culture and lifestyle for our next generation to enjoy?

As you work during the next two days in breakout sessions discussing immigration, planning, and health issues, I urge you to maintain focus on the bigger picture of the challenge associated with managing population change. This issue is bigger than you, it is bigger than me, and it is bigger than my administration. It is all of our problem, and it is a problem of the future as well. However, I am sure that we can come together to create solutions, just as we did the Arts Festival. It is time for each of us to address this issue seriously, to help ensure that American Samoa moves towards a sustainable, healthy future for ourselves and all of the generations that will follow.

Fa’afetai tele lava!